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Agriculture in the News

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#### Report Highlights:

**\*Health Ministry urges consumers to report food safety violations, \*Food safety offices often understaffed or even shuttered**

#### General Information:

Welcome to "News Summary" from Vietnam, an occasional summary of issues of interest to the U. S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within Vietnam, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included and summarized in this report. Significant issues may be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office. Minor grammatical changes have been made for clarification.

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#### **Health Ministry urges consumers to report food safety violations**

Consumers in Vietnam should be encouraged to speak up about companies that violate food safety laws, the deputy health minister said during a special TV show broadcast live nationwide on Monday.

Speaking during a two-hour show on food safety and hygiene, Trinh Quan Huan said educational campaigns about food safety had raised consumer awareness but more work needed to be done.

The broadcast featured a panel of speakers, including business executives and members of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, who spoke about the urgent need to enforce food safety regulations.

Huan said the State planned to invest more funds and offer more training to food safety inspectors. Consumers can submit complaints and information about violators to the Vietnam Standards and Consumer Association (VINASTAS).

He said the State had yet to issue regulations on the suspension or withdrawal of production licenses for companies charged with multiple violations of food safety regulations.

*(Vietnam News, August 26, 2009)*

#### **Food safety offices often understaffed or even shuttered**

No food safety office in the country has yet reached international standards, said Deputy Health Minister Trinh Quan Huan on August 27, 2009.

According to the deputy head of the Food Safety and Hygiene Administration, as many as 20 out of the 50 food safety and hygiene branches were not even open, due to a shortage of qualified staff. She added that only 22 percent of staff had doctorates and 55 percent were qualified chemists.

The Ministry has assigned 12 units to monitor food imports at border gates. Officials claimed that there had been a significant rise in the quality of imports in the first seven months of this year. The number of imported food batches that were considered substandard was down 31 percent compared to the previous year.

The meeting also heard that the number of firms attempting to avoid having their products tested for quality went down nearly 97 percent compared to last year.

Those attending the meeting said the Government's new draft law on food safety and hygiene should impose stricter punishment for violations to help the country comply with its commitments to the World Trade Organization.

There are as many as 134 legal documents on food safety and hygiene, which has caused confusion and difficulties for officials. Furthermore, there are no regulations governing such things as genetically modified foods, according to report presented at the meeting.

The proposed new draft law will govern food safety and hygiene. It also regulates how testing should be carried out and how food safety should be promoted. It also covers issues such as food advertising and product labeling. The draft will be examined by authorities and agencies before being submitted to the National Assembly at its year-end session.

*(Vietnam News, August 28, 2009)*